

# RETURN OF THE KING

Tom Hiddleston and Brie Larson ventured Down Under to meet the mighty, iconic ape in the reboot *Kong: Skull Island*. Words Gill Pringle

From the producers of *Godzilla* comes a Kong bigger and mightier than any that have gone before. He's so huge, its hard to believe he can even hide on an island.

But for the stars of this reboot, *Kong: Skull Island*, playing ape is a dream come true. "To be in a Kong film is such a privilege," says Tom Hiddleston, when *STACK* meets him in West Hollywood. "There's something timeless about the myth of Kong, and the idea of mankind going into undiscovered country, into the jungle, and being humbled by the power of nature, as represented by Kong. I've always loved the myth of this lonely god, or an alpha predator, alone, at the top of the food chain. Peter Jackson's Kong was probably my favourite.

"We shot in the most exquisite locations on the planet, where nature is at its most beautiful and terrifying. We just felt so lucky to be there," he adds, referencing newbie

director Jordan Vogt-Roberts's choice to film in Australia, Vietnam and Hawaii.

No stranger Down Under, where Hiddleston also recently filmed *Thor: Ragnarok*, the actor recalls staying in a house in Queensland where he would run along the beach every day, and see humpback whales. "Every time I saw them, they made me feel very small, these enormous, intelligent creatures. I think we all feel this profound need for that."

Often touted as a future 007, Hiddleston enjoyed demonstrating his Bond-like skills in *Kong: Skull Island*, running through volcanoes, hanging from helicopters and running through the jungle.

"This wasn't my first time flying," says the suave Brit, who enjoys swimming with sharks, mountain-climbing and zip-lining. "I did a commercial for Jaguar in 2013, where I was called upon to drink a cup



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of tea in a helicopter as we flew up the Thames.”

As *Kong's* Captain Conrad, an SAS tracker, Hiddleston locks heads with Samuel L. Jackson's Lieutenant Packard – both men holding opposing views on how to deal with this enormous beast.

However, Brie Larson's self-styled anti-war photographer Weaver – so named in homage to another famously strong screen heroine – comes down firmly on the side of the beast. She grew to love Kong, even if he was just a tennis ball on a stick for much of the shoot.

"I love his gentleness, and his expression, and his passion, and that he is actually a very kind, gentle character – unless provoked. It's not like

we're dealing with this monster, that's a giant terror. He's actually a good king, just don't mess with him," she says.

While filming on the Gold Coast, Larson became obsessed with Twisties and vegemite. "It was nice getting to actually live in Australia. The cool thing about my job is that you really feel like you've lived in a place instead of being there for 10 days, and trying to see all the sights. You're actually rooted and have an apartment and go grocery shopping. I love going to the market in new places because products are completely different. I'd eat Twisties every day!"

Nevertheless, Larson's shooting schedule was a challenge, given that she was filming during the midst of the awards campaign for her movie *Room*, which ultimately paid off with an Oscar, BAFTA and Golden Globe.

Unlike the damsels in distress of previous Kong films, Larson's Weaver can definitely handle herself. "Weaver is interested in telling the truth. Every character in this movie has their own reasons for going on this mission; they're all searching for glory, wanting to be noticed ... have their time.

"And then it's not until they're actually on the island when you realise, 'Oh, there's no such thing as glory in this space. We're in nature, it's just survival. There's nothing beyond that.' And I think she learns a lot about what it means to be a hero, and what it means to be a journalist. Like where do we draw the line?" asks the actress who describes herself as camp counselor for the entire shoot, arranging weekend activities for cast and crew – everything from laser tag to movie nights and even shutting down a theme park for a day where they took endless rollercoaster rides.

The locals, however, did play a few tricks on her. "There's a fake thing that they tell tourists about tree bears and I was told to look out for these tree bears, that look like evil koalas. People told me: 'You better watch out, because they hang out in the trees, and they're gonna jump on you, and tear your head off'. And there's even signs on the side of the road warning about them. It took me a while to realise that it's a joke they play on tourists!"

• *Kong: Skull Island* is in cinemas on March 9